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ABSTRACT

The January 1994 issue of "The Annals" of the American Academy of Political and Social Science provides an overview of thought and discussion concerning the role of colleges and universities during World War II and in the postwar era. Edited by T. R. McConnell and Malcolm Willey, the issue contained articles by educators, most of whom became more well known after the War. Published 6 months before "D-Day" and the enactment of the G.I. Bill, the articles show the seriousness of planning for the readjustments that would be needed after the war. The authors were well informed of the mistakes made after World War I, and they were confident that the United States had learned from these mistakes. The articles reflect concern for the planning necessary to accommodate the returning servicemen who would seek additional education. Taken together, these essays in this issue show remarkable foresight. (SLD)

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HIGHER EDUCATION AND WORLD WAR II

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HIGHER EDUCATION AND WORLD WAR II

by Cameron Fincher

The January 1944 issue of The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science gives a remarkable overview of thought and discussion concerning the role of colleges and universities during World War II— and in the postwar era. Edited by T.R. McConnell and Malcolm Willey, then at the University of Minnesota, the issue contained articles written by educators who became even better known for their numerous contributions after the war. Indeed, the recognizable names among the contributors suggest that an assembly of forward-looking thinkers had set forth a national agenda to continue the wartime cooperation of the federal government and institutions of higher education.[1]

Published six months before "D-Day" and the enactment of the G.I. Bill, the articles convey the seriousness of planning for the readjustments that would be needed after the war. None of the authors had the slightest anticipation of any outcome other than victory. They were well informed about the mistakes following victory in 1918, and they were confident that such mistakes could be avoided in the future. Both the nation and higher education had learned "valuable lessons" during the war and those lessons should serve well after the war.

Skeptics, reading the contributed articles 50 years later, may wonder if ever before or since have leading educators read so well the "signs" of their time—and then displayed such commendable foresight in discussing the future.

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Prior to America's entry into WWII and as early as June 1940, the American Council on Education, under the leadership of George F. Zook, issued a statement on "Education and the National Defense." All "agencies of education" would be needed in the event of war and consideration must be given to the conservation of educational resources and values. Education should remain the responsibility of schools and colleges and thereby ensure a high quality of instruction, research, and administration.

Following the declaration of war in 1941, the nation's colleges accelerated the progress of students in college—as one way of fulfilling their pledge of cooperation. Faculties, students, and facilities became national resources to be used in the preparation of "broadly educated and highly trained men and women" for national service. Following enactment of a lower draft age (18 years), the military services established cooperative oncampus programs for the training of officers, pilots, and other specialized personnel. Despite various problems, the mutual benefits to colleges and the armed services quickly became significant and substantial.

Over 300 colleges were chosen as sites for Army or Navy training programs. Thus oncampus training programs became the forerunner of the G.I. Bill and other post-WWI programs involving cooperation between the military services and institutions of higher education. By 1944 the effectiveness of specialized training programs had revealed numerous ways in which colleges could improve classroom teaching and perhaps

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develop a more "democratic educational philosophy." As Malcolm Willey points out in his article on college training programs, the outcome of such programs was not only "training for military service" but "education for democracy". Years later, a graduate of the Navy V-12 program would write a history of the program entitled, "Leadership For A Lifetime".[2]

Equally important at the time, were successful training programs which called to educational attention the advantages of developing special curricula. In its production of over 2000 training films, the Navy also demonstrated the advisability of using well designed charts and graphs as an aid to learning. Not only did charts enable students to learn "more and faster," they could "remember longer" what they had learned.

More important for the future of higher education, wartime experiences created a more favorable outlook on what colleges could do to serve national needs. Numerous participants in oncampus training programs found college to be more beneficial than they had previously expected. Many of them returned to college campuses after the war—and many of them remained oncampus for long and productive careers.

In addition to other benefits, wartime experiences in college training programs raised numerous questions that would continue to be asked throughout the post-war era. Malcolm Willey asked if WWII veterans would prefer "less technical, more humanistic" courses in the continuance of their education. Sidney Pressey questioned whether colleges would later increase their productivity by accelerating student progress in meeting degree requirements. Earl McGrath wondered if technical education had been emphasized so strongly that students would lack an understanding of the physical, social, and political world in which they lived. And T.R. McConnell asked if specialized training had dislodged the liberal arts from their central location in college curricula.

Other contributors to the January 1944 issue raised other questions about the influence of "wartime trends" in such fields as engineering, business, agriculture, and education. The war's effect on higher education faculties was a question of immediate and direct interest. If veterans returned to college in great numbers, by whom would they be taught? As reported in the National Roster of Scientific and Specialized Personnel, over 85,000 faculty members were employed by the nation's 1,573 institutions of higher education—but by no means was an adequate supply of college teachers assured.

POST-WAR READJUSTMENTS

Although the larger section of the January 1944 issue discussed "Some Postwar Problems," the contributors give an optimistic emphasis to the possibilities and opportunities that would occur when the public interest could focus on its postwar responsibilities. No mention is made of a "G.I. Bill of Rights," but the word "readjustment" is used frequently. Thus, the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944 is a logical consequence of the uses made of colleges and universities during the war. As more than one contributor implied, if institutions of higher education did not prepare for the return and re-education of military veterans, a new system of higher education would be established.

Among the "problems" that would find beneficial solutions was the acceptance of military veterans who had not graduated from high school. Colleges were encouraged to "examine carefully and evaluate thoroughly the educational background, the actual knowledge and skill which the individual may have accumulated" and to identify areas in which knowledge and skills were lacking. Years later deans and admission officers would boast of the veterans who were admitted by passing the GED (General Educational Development) tests and then graduated with honors.

Related issues were the awarding of academic credit for wartime training and the acceleration of students in meeting graduation requirements. Many colleges with lock-step curricula were first dubious—and then pleased—with veterans who could by-pass crowded courses at the freshman level and pass courses at sophomore or junior levels. Other colleges learned from experience that students would take advantage of increased courseloads and summer school to meet graduation requirements earlier.

Other wartime experiences in the development of standardized tests for admissions, academic placement, end-of-course examinations, and educational advisement resulted in testing and counseling centers that enhanced student services. As Ralph Tyler pointed out, educational development as a result of military service required evidence that could serve as credentials in the continuance of their education. In this effort, the American Council on Education provided commendable leadership in developing methods by which competence could be demonstrated through examinations.

POSTWAR PLANNING

In 1942 when he approved the amendment to the Selective Service Act authorizing the drafting of men eighteen years old, President Roosevelt called for a study of the means by which drafted college students could resume their studies after the war. In making its final report the appointed committee recommended that the Federal Government provide the financial support needed for service personnel to obtain one calendar year of education or training. For "exceptionally able ex-service personnel," they suggested extension of "as much as three years".

In 1943 the American Council on Education surveyed its members and reported agreement that the Federal Government had a definite responsibility to provide educational opportunities for military veterans. Well-balanced and flexible programs should be available—and should not be restricted to vocational training. Assuming that some states would provide educational opportunities, federal and state government should work closely with appropriate agencies. The major responsibility, however, should remain with the individual college or university (on the condition of equal opportunities for all).

Donald J. Shank states that "in light of these reports, educational organizations and institutions can at least begin to plan." He reports an estimated loss of "more than 1,500,000 man-years of collegiate education" for the years 1940-1941 through 1944-1945. The estimate assumes correctly that: one, the war would end in 1945 and two, the Selective Service would continue to operate on its present basis. Although many students withdrew from colleges for reasons other than military service, "it is a safe assumption that at least 80 percent of the loss is due to induction into the armed forces".

Although as many as 300,000 servicemen may have been enrolled in college during 1944, no one would deny the accumulated national deficit of trained personnel at the collegiate level when the war ended. Studies of postwar expectations among service personnel suggest that as many as 420,000 men and women might return to college. The effect that a "well-organized and well-promoted national, state, or institutional program" could have on the plans of veterans had not been estimated.

Contributors to the January 1944 issue could agree that colleges could not proceed much further without clearer indications of the direction public policy would take. The nation's first priority, of course, must be given to the demobilization of service personnel. A general plan for education would then require information on the "needs and desires of men and women" following their discharge. Also required was "an honest description of the facilities within educational institutions to provide postwar educational opportunities".

When such information became available, a "truly constructive guidance program" leading to the "sound adjustment of the individual" could be developed. Much of this guidance could be provided within the armed forces. In particular, the armed forces should be encouraged to select and train men and women "highly competent to advise individuals and groups" regarding the opportunities available upon discharge. At the time of their discharge, service personnel should again receive information "in effective and attractive form" regarding available opportunities.

Guidance facilities were also imperative within the home communities of service men and women. The most effective means of presenting information to ex-service men and women should be the local public school system. The most important guidance or counseling centers should be located at the institutions where individuals would enroll. There the individual's needs and abilities could be soundly analyzed—and the institution could develop programs well suited for the abilities of entering students. In his acknowledgement of "this highly difficult job," Donald Shank emphasizes that the "proper educational adjustment" of individual service men and women: (a) depends on all agencies working together, and (b) calls for "all the educational wisdom and statesmanship available".

THE G.I. BILL AND POSTWAR PROGRESS

Reading the January 1944 issue of *The Annals* fifty-six years later is like running into "old friends" we have not seen in recent years. Their faces are familiar but they are not recognized until they speak their names. When they do, we suddenly remember much more than who they are.

George Zook, T.R. McConnell, Earl McGrath, and George Stoddard were appointed in 1946 to President Harry S. Truman's Commission on Higher Education. Asked to seek ways in which educational opportunities, resources, and facilities could be expanded, the Truman Commission, chaired by Zook, responded with a remarkable testament to higher education and the means by which individuals could extend their education as far as their abilities and interests would permit. The wisdom of such thoughts comes from wartime training programs on college campuses and from the return of veterans to complete their education.[3]

Dramatic changes would continue to take place during the postwar years—and when the returning veterans graduated, other students took their place. In 1964 the first of "the postwar babies" enrolled in college and initiated further change. Although the years 1964-1973 were remembered as a "time of troubles," progress could be charted over the long-term. Two decades of rapid growth and development had not prepared institutions of higher learning for a decade of dissension.

In the 1980s and again, in the 1990s new waves of reform brought different challenges and a new awareness of changing demands and expectations. Other commissions, councils, and committees would issue numerous, comprehensive, and relevant reports addressing the problems and issues of higher education—in an open, voluntary, and rapidly changing society. Throughout the ensuing "stages" of protest, dissent, reform, renewal that characterized the postwar years, the influence of wartime experiences could be detected as "alive, if not in good health".

Despite many false starts, sudden changes of direction, periodic loss of momentum, roller-coaster ups and downs, and unpredictable weather, higher education has made remarkable progress. And despite the difficulty of charting their course of progress—and with the continuing problem of never knowing its destination—higher education, as it is known in the first year of a new millennium, can identify its "new departure" or "turning point" as "wartime experiences that encouraged postwar planning."

READJUSTMENTS IN THE POST-WAR YEARS

DONALD J. SHANK: On post-war education

> "the readjustment of each serviceman and servicewoman should be considered in terms of the individual's abilities and needs, and the total resources and facilities that are available."

T.R. MCCONNELL: On the liberal arts

> "Special training is the point of the spear . . . the talents and capacities of the individual, his qualities of mind and character are the shaft, the force and power behind all special training.

EARL J. MCGRATH: On general education

> "men who have lived in military camps or on ships amidst the hardships of war, often facing death, will have reached a philosophical and spiritual maturity far beyond their years."

GEORGE D. STODDARD: On statewide planning

> "There is no one 'best plan' for every state under all conditions. Each state should initiate studies and programs, knitting them into regional and national determinations at appropriate consolidation points."

E.G. WILLIAMSON: On student services

> "Another lesson to be learned . . . is the indispensability of a continuous and extensive program of research designed to improve instruments of diagnosis and classification, to evaluate procedures and techniques, and to keep the practical program abreast of [its] needs."

JOHN DALE RUSSELL: On post-war financial need

> "There can be little disagreement with the policy that higher education shall cease to be a privilege based on wealth . . . that it shall be made available to the more capable young people of the country regardless of their economic status."

MALCOLM M. WILLEY: On a new concept of democratic education

> "a government which needed their services in war was willing to meet the costs . . . Are these same men not likely to ask why there is not a parallel responsibility . . . to train them for peacetime service as well?"

ENDNOTES AND REFERENCES

1. *Higher Education and the War.* Edited by T.R. McConnell and Malcoln M. Willey. *The Annals* of The American Academy of Political and Social Science, Volume 231, January 1944, (21 articles, pages 1-176).

2. James G. Schneider, *The Navy V-12 Program: Leadership for a Lifetime.* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987).

3. Keith W. Olson, *The G.I. Bill, the Veterans, and the Colleges.* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1974);

See also:

Michael J. Bennett, *When Dreams Come True: The G.I. Bill and The Making of Modern America.* (Washington, D.C.: Brassey's, Inc., 1996);

Milton Greenberg, *The G.I. Bill: The Law That Changed American.* (New York: Lickle Publishing, Inc., 1997);

Educational Record: Special Issue on "The GI Bill's Lasting Legacy". Volume 75, Number 4 (Fall 1994); Includes articles by Olson, Bennett, and others.

4. At least three or four distinct "eras of commission reports" followed the enactment of federal legislation in the postwar years. The Nation Defense Education Act of 1958 can be used as one "bracket" and the Educational Amendments Act of 1972 will serve as the other. Most prominent, of course, are the reports issued by the Carnegie Commission on Higher Education and its successor, the Carnegie Council on Policy Studies. In the 1980s national and regional associations or organizations took the lead in publishing commission reports on assessment, accountability, and accreditation. Statewide commissions continued to issue periodic reports that usually followed the election of a new governor.

THIS ISSUE . . .

This issue of IHE PERSPECTIVES has been written with both appreciation and astonishment at the foresight found within the pages of a publication issued in January 1944—a few short months before D-Day In Europe and passage of the "G.I. Bill." The contributors—all of them well known educators—did indeed have a VISION of higher education as it should be after the war.

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